SPAWN
THE DARK AGES
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13
DIGITAL EDITION

Todd McFarlane & Image Comics Present

A Child's Crusade Part IV
Sacrifices

Dedicated to Duncan Rouleau

STORY
Brian Holguin

ART
Liam McCormack-Sharp

COVER
Liam McCormack-Sharp

LETTERING
Richard Starkings
and Comicraft's
Oscar Gongora

COLOR
Mark Nicholas

SPAWN created by Todd McFarlane

SPAWN DARK AGES 12 SUMMARY:

Cogliostro returns to his pagan horde, where prisoners are being tortured and killed. Covenant expresses doubts about the army under his command, but Maeve tells the children that any who wish to leave may do so. All decide to follow her despite Covenant's warnings. As they march on, they come across the remains of the prisoners that Cogliostro's men have killed. Suddenly, several of the pagan warriors come from out of the woods to attack the children. The children's victory is short-lived as they see from a hilltop a huge gathering of pagan warlords that is preparing to do battle.

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Cornwall. Beneath cold slate skies, a nightmare unfolds.
A moment ago, this ragged army of runaway children, led by the mysterious warrior-maid called Maeve, brimmed with the thrill of victory.
Now, they gaze into the deep, black chasm of despair.

Her visions -- clearly sent from God -- have warned her of this moment.
An inhuman army of darkness, spreading chaos across the world...
Evil they may be, but clearly they are also human.
Dressed in skins of animals, flesh painted with blood and piaments, but mortal nonetheless. They fight with drunken rage.

These beast warriors are strong, merciless and seem to feel no pain.
For all their faith in a benevolent god, a hapless company of children is no match for them.
The cause of the righteous is surely doomed.
Or, rather, it would be...

If not for the Hellspawn, Lord Covenant, cursed for his crimes in life, damned to walk the world in his afterlife, part demon, part man.
Half a century ago, he disappeared from the world, hidden away in a cave.
Maeve sought him out. Offered him a chance at salvation, a chance to redeem his tainted soul.
He fights like a warrior possessed.

A witness to the brutality of the crusade's, even Covenant is shocked by the bloodshed this day.
Maeve weeps for the children. How many dead? How many wounded, maimed for life?
And what of their attackers?
They twitch and shake in violent convulsion before collapsing loudly into death.

She sizes up the casualties. They lie like sleeping babies, like egg shells broken in their nests.
The survivors look to her like betrayed children, which she supposes they are.
Are the bad men all dead? Did any escape to warn others?
How many of her charges fell today?
And was it worth it?
For the first time in her crusade, Maeve doesn't have the answers.

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How did this happen? This isn't right...
This is exactly what I told you would happen.
What do I do now, Lord Covenant? Tell me.
Burn the dead, carry the wounded. And forget about your mad scheme. Your God seems to have withdrawn his favor.
Balls!
What did you say?
Balls! I said balls!
We can't lose courage when day grows dark.
You will not distract me from my course, nor will you undermine my faith. God was testing us. I hope he finds us worthy.

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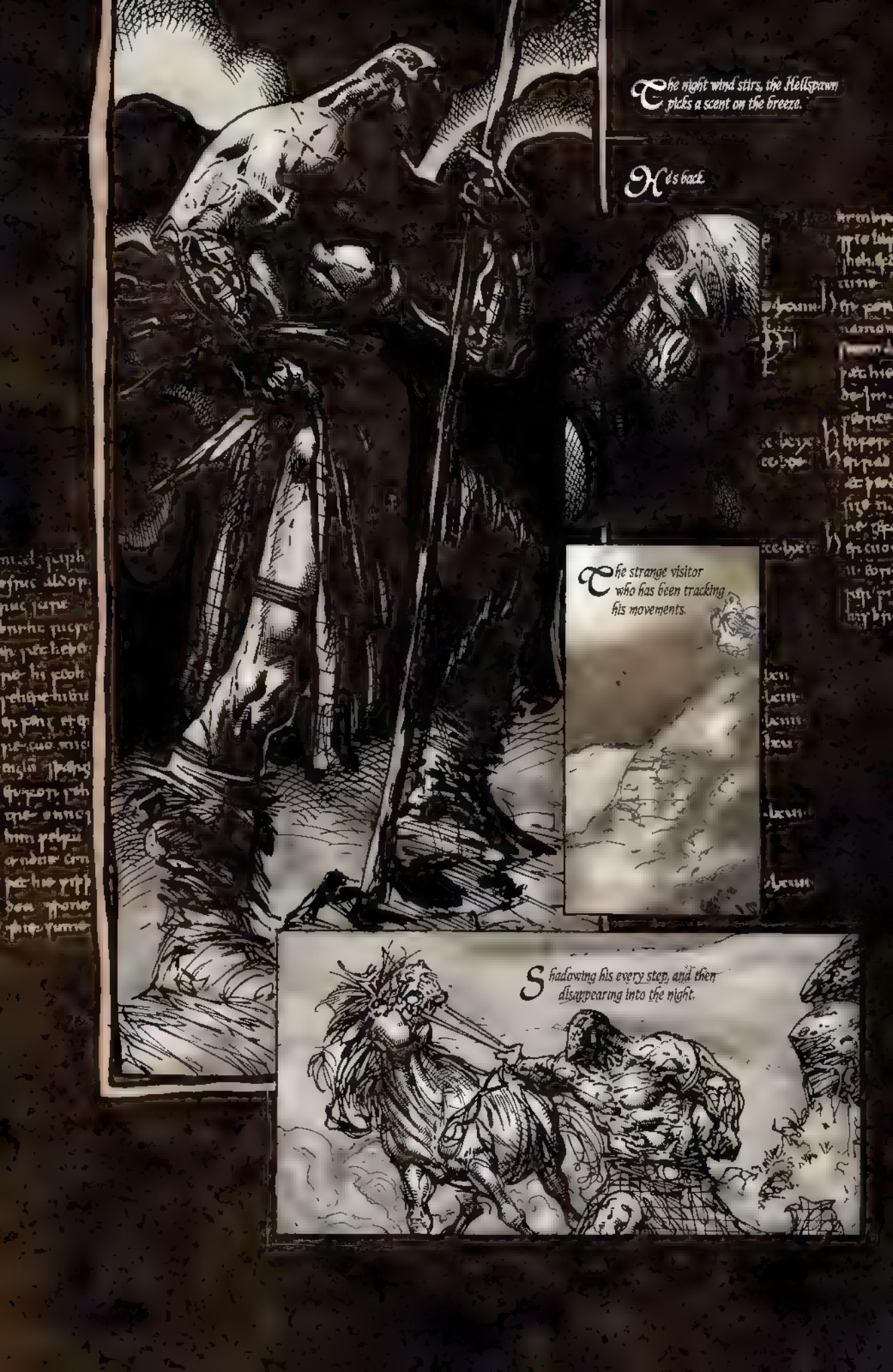
Listen! Let me have your attention! Round up the dead-friend and foe alike. They shall be buried in the Christian fashion, with full benediction.
Go!

But these'r Heathens, miss. It's not proper!
That is for God to decide, not us. For our part, let us make sure our consciences shall be clean.

Meanwhile...
The Hellspawn examines the bodies of his fallen enemies. Their faces contorted into cruel grimaces, their muscles twisted and gnarled.
His first thought is that these warriors were demon-possessed.
But no. He looks closer Discoloration in the mouth, swelling at the joints.
Some sort of toxin has been used Some potion or philter that drives men to bloodlust
But still the question remains: Who is behind this?

Elsewhere, a royal entourage is dispatched...
So, what do you think?
Not my job to think, is it? If some country tart needs talking to, well, off we go, then.
You don't think it's strange? The King paying all this mind to the motives of some upstart wench?
Hah! He acts from experience, I think. If Eleanor of Aquitaine was your mother you'd be wary of uppity women yourself.
They say this Maeve is a saint, that she speaks to God. Do you think it's true?
When I was a boy, there was a toothless, drooling idiot who sat naked in the town square, farting madrigals. He said God spoke to him, too.
We are men of action, Godfrey. Let the clergy worry about God.


The night wind stirs, the Hellspawn picks a scent on the breeze.
He's back.
The strange visitor who has been tracking his movements.
Shadowing his every step, and then disappearing into the night.

The mysterious "Ghost on the Hill."
But this ghost, too, proves to be of all too solid flesh.

At camp.
We come from the court of his majesty, King John.
What do you want?
King who?
By order of his royal highness, we demand to speak to the maiden Maeve
This is ridiculous. I pose no threat to the king. I fight in God's army not in the army of man. The King's worries are not mine.
Some might interpret your words as heresy. I remind you that church doctrine supports the notion of Divine Right. That the King is the voice of God on earth.
Please, the king looks for no grievance. We merely must ascertain your intentions.

Shortly..
So, you can understand my cause? My passion? Then I am glad you came
Forgive our doubting you. We shall return to court and tell the king of your great deeds and ask him to send you a proper army
Tell him to send me his prayers, and that will be enough. I thank you
'Tis true She is a saint God bless you, my lady. God bless you.

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Well, well, well. Look who's crawled out of his hole. You didn't think the world stopped without you?
You! Cagliostro! You are behind this madness"!
You make war with children! Stand forth and explain yourself

Spare me your melodrama. I don't give a toss about your herd of brats. A fool's grave follows fool's pride, I say.
And I said explain yourself. What game are you playing at, Cogliostro?
Hold your temper and I'll tell you.
There That's better.
What I'm doing, is claiming my freedom. And yours too, if you care to join me.
I know you like the sound of that, don't you? That's how your little strumpet got you to play nurse-maid, isn't it The promise of freedom from your curse?
I follow only my conscience I will take my punishment like a man.

Will you now? Tell me that when you have walked this earth for as long as I have.
When you have been denied the grace of heaven or the peace of death since before this island had a name.
How long have you been a Hellspawn? A hundred years. Less? You are a sapling and I am an Oak.
You still don't see what it's all about, do you? This great poxy game of good and evil? If god is so powerful, why is his world such a bloody mess?
If he is so beneficent, why does he give us false hope of a better life? Let me tell you how it really is.

"It's about a pair of arrogant, needy little bastards collecting trinkets to impress each other.
"Heaven above in her shining, silver city, hell below in the pits of perdition. Playing chess for the hearts of mortals.
"One side claims a piece, then the other, and nothing much is ever solved. One side never gets too far ahead.
"We're pawns, you and me. And I'm bloody sick of it. I want out."

"So I found me a new game. There are other forces in this world. Old powers, old gods.
"They're all around us, in the shadows, on the wind. They don't worry much about us, because they have every beast and bird and stone and tree to commune with.
"But their power is great. And it is very real.
"I plan to wake the old Gods, the agents of the sacred Green World. Align myself with them and step beyond the hem of both Heaven and Hell."

It can be done, I know it can. And it can be done for two as easily as one.
And exactly how do you plan on waking these heathen ghosts?
Oh, I think you can work that bit out for yourself. I'm going to offer them a sacrifice.
You know, at first I thought that little bitch was going to cause me trouble. But now I see she's a blessing in disguise.
Yes, you've done very well to lead her and her pack of whelps to me.
Now tell me...
How badly do you want your freedom?

I will not allow this. I have sworn my protection. I will not traffic in your Pagan ways, be they real or imagined.
God may punish me, but he is still God.
Bollocks. You sound like Job of old. How nobly you suffer the wrath of a fickle God. That mad girl has gotten to you. Given you something to hope for, eh?
Good luck to you, then. But you can't stop this from happening. Neither of us can. The die is cast, Hellspawn. There is no turning back.
Very well. If you want a fight, so be it.
But know this: I could have killed you today. Tomorrow I shall not be so kind.

What news, Lord Covenant?
Raise the troops, Meave. This is war!

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